RUDE AWAKENING a film by Warren Sonbert
Whitney Museum 5/25/76 John Matturri

Warren Sonbert's Rude Awakening, shown at the Whitney from May 25 to May 30, is a film of accretion, not only of individual images but, more than that, of the interconnections between those images. In it seemingly disconnected shots incessantly follow one another, often separated by lengths of leader, and the viewer is implicitly called to establish, for himself, the interrelationships which exist between them. Thus,.at first, the film can be viewed as something of a puzzle to be solved.

The 'solution' to the initial images is simple--all involve linear movement and portrayals of transportation--but, as the film moves on, the range of interconnections between images multiplies as incessantly as do the individual shots. Content, color, movement, rhythmn, composition, and almost every other possible analogical device by which shots can be linked are used to allow the film to cohere into a unity. As each image is put forth, a variety of connections must be grasped linking it to the shot immediately preceding it, to those more distant from it, and, finally, to an entire system of interrelationships which, by the middle of the film, comes to have almost an independant existence apart from the images upon which it is based. This interconnecting network becomes so complex that it resists any attempt to place it within a 'rational' or hierarchical scheme and it exists, like a language or a world, as a mass of intertwined 'family resemblances' which cohere through the mutual resonance of the parts. As the film progressed I became less and less interested in the individual shots and began to see them more as just elements in the system. Paradoxically, however, the emergence of this overall interconnecting network as the central experience of the film does not overwhelm the individual images or render them invisible but, rather, these images only begin to vibrate with a life of their own when they take their places within that network.

As one views the film,an awakening occurs each time a link between images is grasped, each time a section of the puzzle is solved. In my experience of it, these are just preliminaries to the final awakening illumination, which the film provides. As the accretion of images and association builds it becomes impossible to continue the process of problem solving, to consciously connect the shots. In the end, the mind, baffled by the film'scomplexity, must simply give into it as one would give into a world. At the start, the pleasure derived from this film is the cerebral one of puzzle solving but, after this becomes impossible, after one simply gives into it, one directly comes to experience the film as a unified system of mutual resonances. It is the experience of this mutual vibration, of the underlying system of the film, which I take to be the "rude awakening" of the title.

Towards the end of the film there were times when, perhaps because of its length, the tensions holding it together did collapse for me. Even these problem areas, however, were not without interest for they allowed the images themselves, alone and without the resonances of association, to once again reassert themselves. The conflict between element and system which arose at these points, a conflict perhaps never wholly absent from the film, set up further tensions within it and placed its structure into an even clearer perspective. The essential experience of the film for me, however, remains embodied in that moment when the system of mutual resonances upon which the film centers directly presents itself beneath and beyond the individual images.